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AUTHOR Stank, Peggy L.
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ABSTRACT

The Pennsylvania School Improvement Program (PSIP) was created to assist local schools and school districts in the development of curriculum improvement strategies. The process involves the use of "linkers," curriculum specialists who work with teams from the local level to ascertain needs, then connect the local teams with the research and development agencies that can provide information and resources to help meet those needs. This document discusses the competencies and attributes necessary in linkers, then describes the professional histories and characteristics of two unidentified, typical linkers in the PSIP program. The linker role is characterized by marginality, variability, and segmentation, all qualities that allow the linker to fulfill the many responsibilities that make the linker the key to the success of the PSIP. (Author/PGD)

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PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLMENT PROFILES

A CASE STUDY OF TWO LINKAGE AGENTS

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PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

A CASE STUDY OF TWO LINKAGE AGENTS

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PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Project Staff

Jay Smink, *Director*

Peg Stank, *Evaluator*

Report Writer

Peg Stank

Bureau of Research and Evaluation
Office of Research, Planning and Data Management
Pennsylvania Department of Education

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A Case Study of Two Linkage Agents in
the Pennsylvania School Improvement Program

I. Introduction

For many years a major gap has existed in education between the knowledge producer and the knowledge user. In less pretentious terms the outcomes of educational research and development activities have not reached the classroom practitioner. Estimates of the time lapse between the production of research and development (R&D) outcomes and actual use in the field range from 25 to 50 years dependent upon your point of reference. This situation is frustrating to both the classroom practitioner and the research community. The quality of the education provided for students is dependent upon the utilization of current up-to-date research and development outcomes that will increase the effectiveness of classroom practices. One of the charges that society gives to the educational system is to prepare students to cope with a rapidly changing world. If this charge is to be met then the research-practitioner gap in the knowledge production network must be reduced.

The Pennsylvania School Improvement Program (PSIP) is a major effort to improve classroom instruction in basic skills through use of R&D outcomes. It links the Pennsylvania Department of Education, seven intermediate units and research and development agencies (RISE, RBS, LRDC and PDE) with school districts to use a problem-solving approach to improve instruction.

PSIP is built upon the concept of an intermediate unit (IU) linkage person serving as an educational extension agent to facilitate two-way communication among a local school and sources of R&D outcomes/products. This Linker is supported by a team of resource persons to provide technical assistance to a school site. The team is called a School Assistance Team (SAT). The Linker works cooperatively with a Local Action Team (LAT) from a school to analyze student and program needs and then select and implement an R&D outcome or product appropriate to these needs.

PSIP Strategies

There are four major strategies in the PSIP process: (1) Needs Definition, (2) Knowledge Consolidation, (3) Selection and (4) Implementation.

Each of these strategies includes planned structured workshops for the Local Action Team (LAT) with follow-up assistance by the IU Linker.

A brief description of the PSIP process is provided as context for the Linker case studies in Section II and III.

School Improvement Process Milestones

The milestones in the School Improvement Process refer to the critical events that must occur to insure success as a school level team progresses through a structured process for school improvement. The milestones are clustered into four stages of the process.

Preliminary Activities for School Improvement

1. Identification of district priority areas.
2. Commitment of the school to participate in SIP.
3. Initial SIP planning completed.

Note: All of the school-level milestones below relate to the district priority areas.

Needs Assessment

4. Target concerns in priority area specified.
5. Student needs identified.
6. Program needs identified.
7. Summary report of student, programs and staff needs.

Selection

8. Identification of alternative programs/products.
9. Program/product selected for installation.

   (Alternative) All programs/products are rejected and school enters a curriculum development process.

Implementation and Evaluation

10. Implementation and Evaluation Plan produced and approved.
11. Installation of program/product.
12. Evaluation of program installation and impact.
13. Program decisions are made based on evaluation.

The Role of the Linking Agent in the PSIP Process

The keystone for success in the PSIP process is the IU Linker who functions directly with the Local Action Team (LAT) on an ongoing basis. This Linker provides the external expertise needed to move the LAT through the four-step problem solving process. He/she is instrumental in linking the LAT to external resources. The Linker has access to resource persons serving on a School Assessment Team (SAT).

Two PSIP Linkers were studied over a three-year period to provide an in-depth analyses of the role of the linking agent. Case studies of these two linkers are presented in Section III and Section IV of this report.

The general procedures used to collect the data for the case studies were: observation of the linker interactions with school staff and PSIP agency staff, linker self-evaluation questionnaires, Local Action Team evaluation of the Linkers and interviews with host agency staff, the linkers, the linker supervisors, the Local Action Team members, and with school administrators.

II. Conceptualization and Definition of the Linker Role

The Linker - As Defined by the Literature

Although the label of Linking Agent or Linker is fairly new the concept of an external person functioning as facilitator for an internal group within a social organization is well established.

Havelock in 1973 presented a model of linkage which described the change agent or a linking agent as: (1) catalyst who primarily counteracts the inertia of the system, who nudges, prods the system into action, (2) a process helper who provides leadership for clients in a problem solving process, (3) a solution giver who knows where to find alternative solutions and when to offer them to clients. Many other definitions of the linking agent role have been set forth in the literature, the labels may differ but conceptually the roles fall into these categories: process facilitator, technical assister, resource accesser/broker, information provider.

Within the role categories common across linkage models are certain clusters of skills. Based on the literature on change processes, Smink (1979), has synthesized 10 clusters of Linker skills: (1) communication, (2) group facilitating, (3) diagnosis/ problem solving, (4) resource acquisition/utilization, (5) conflict management/utilization, (6) evaluation, (7) management, organization, and planning, (8) implementation, (9) dissemination/marketing and (10) survival. These Linker skills are defined on page 4. From both the literature and his personal experiences at the Network, Crandall (1978) has identified four categories of prerequisite personal attributes for successful linkers: (1) cognitive orientation, (2) intrapersonal characteristics, (3) work-related characteristics and (4) personal qualities. These Linker attributes are defined on page 5.

It is important to note that the Linker skills are behaviors or competencies that can be learned. It is possible to provide structured training for Linkers in all 10 areas of Smink's Linker Competencies. However, the Linker attributes defined by Crandall are personal characteristics that the individual brings with him/her to the Linker role. These attributes can be modified or expanded through effective training and experience but the entry level of the attributes does affect the successful development of Linker skills/competencies.

Figure 1, page 6 shows the relationship of the Crandall Linker atrributes to the Smink Linker Skills. Based upon the PSIP experiences and data collected as part of this study, estimates of the effects of Linker attributes upon successful development of Linker skills are provided.

Smink's Categories of Linker Skills

Communications

Those listening ard speaking skills which a consultant uses in all phases of working with administrators, teachers and other LEA personnel such as paraphrasing techniques, nonverbal communications, communications under pressure, behavior descriptions and giving and receiving feedback.

Group Facilitating Skill

Techniques for effective group leadership, facilitating decision-making using alternative modes, understanding roles played in groups and their positive and negative contributions to group effectiveness, improving interpersonal relationships as they affect group functioning and assessing individual and group task effectiveness and satisfaction.

Diagnosis and Problem Solving

Those skills which a consultant uses to help his/her client(s) eliminate or cope with a situation identified as a problem, procedures for clearly identifying problems, uses for brainstorming techniques and force field analysis, and procedures for generating solutions and determining implications.

Resource Acquisition/Utilization

Considering resource utilization as part of an ongoing process of planning and program improvement which includes utilizing style, how to determine what human, program, informational and fiscal resources are available and how to tap them, how and when to use the resource of last resort (yourself), and the centrality of resource utilization to the linkage function.

Conflict Management/Utilization

The ability to affect the attitudes, behaviors or ideas of others, the ability to control the behavior of another person by reason of position or authority, using procedures for identifying styles of influence, assessing group actions, diagnosing power struggles and developing a framework for dealing constructively with conflict in everyday work situations.

Evaluation Skills

Identifying components to be evaluated, determining evaluation questions, evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting procedures.

Management, Organization/Planning

Designing and organizing overall activities necessary for successful task management such as defining objectives, activities, expected outcomes, getting timeline for activities, assigning responsibilities and monitoring progress.

Implementation

Planning major components of a plan of action for implementing a change in a program or curriculum including major activities, timeline, costs, evaluation.

Dissemination/Marketing

Planning and designing the tactics and strategies necessary for widespread adaption and adoption of successful practices.

Survival Skills

The ability to cope with a wide range of unique situations that require self confidence, professional integrity, creative conceptualization and client centered decisions.

Crandall's Linker Attributes

Cognitive Orientation

- Conceptualizing Problem
- Assimilating New Information
- Creativity
- Application of Theory
- Closure Timing

Intrapersonal Characteristics

- Proactivty
- Maturity
- Reflectivity

Work Related Characteristics

- Initiative
- Dependability
- Productivity
- Task Completion
- Loyalty to Groups and Host Agency

Personal Qualities

- Open/Candid
- Self Directed
- Varied Past Experiences (perspective)
- Fairness
- Integrity
- Enthusiastic (triggers it in others)
- Sense of Humor
- Social Behavior Appropriate to Client

Figure 1
Linker Competencies and Attributes

Smink's Linker Competencies	Crandall's Linker Attributes*			
	Cognitive Orientation	Intra-personal	Work Related	Personal Qualities
1. Communication	2	2	1	2
2. Group facilitating	3	2	2	2
3. Diagnosis/Problem Solving	3	2	2	3
4. Resource Acquisition/Utilization	2	2	2	2
5. Conflict Management/Utilization	3	3	2	2
6. Evaluation Skills	3	2	1	2
7. Management/Organization Planning	3	3	2	2
8. Implementation	2	2	2	2
9. Dissemination/Marketing	2	2	2	3
10. Survival	3	3	2	3

*Level of Attribute Scale

1 - Minimal level needed for development of this skill.

2 High level needed for this skill but can be developed concurrently during skill training.

3 High level is critical for development of this skill--must be present to enter training in this area.

From Figure 1 it can be inferred that cognitive orientation is a critical attribute that should be present in a person upon entry to the linkage role, since it is required for effective Linker training in six of the ten skill areas and must be extended during training in the remaining four areas. Next in importance is the category of personal qualities which also affects all ten skill areas. However, only four skill areas require a high level of personal quality attributes for entry into training. Personal qualities can be developed concurrently during training in the remaining six areas. It appears that the work related Linker attributes can be developed or extended during training in all of the skill areas and the intrapersonal skills are affected similarly in seven of the ten skill areas.

The Linker As Defined by PSIP

The critical Linker skills required for the PSIP Process were identified in rank order as (1) group facilitating skills, (2) diagnosis and problem solving skills, (3) conflict management/utilization, (4) management/organization and planning skills and (5) communication skills. On the basis of Figure 1 and this ranking of leadership skills the most relevant Linker attributes for PSIP were (1) cognitive orientation, (2) personal qualities and (3) intrapersonal skills.

The PSIP Linker is basically a change agent. The Linker initiates entry into a school district and builds the rapport necessary for a successful change effort. He/she is a generalist with broad-based expertise in interpersonal communication skills and group processes. In addition he/she is expected to have a primary area of expertise in some curriculum area by virtue of past training and classroom teaching experiences. This linkage agent builds a relationship of trust with the LAT. He/she must be knowledgeable about the change process, especially the critical features of this process and his/her role in it.

Because of the high intensity of the Linker involvement with the LAT during PSIP activities, he/she must have a broad role base that will allow selecting appropriate roles for emphasis in varying situations. This is especially important when an LAT is reluctant to enter into a full working team relationship. The Linker almost has to be all things to all people--confidant, leader, resource person, liaison to external resources, intermediary with higher level administrators, provider of sustenance, broker of R & D outcomes and R & D advocate are only a sampling of Linker roles practiced during the PSIP process.

III. Linker Case Studies

Linker A

Personal Background. Linker A is a white middle class male in his mid thirties. He has resided in Northwestern Pennsylvania all of his life and was an employe of an Intermediate Unit in that area (IU-A). He has a bachelor of education, two master's degrees (one in social studies and one in educational administration). During his time as a PSIP Linker he completed his doctoral work and received a doctorate in curriculum planning. Linker A's bachelor and master's degree programs were completed at a state college in Northwestern Pennsylvania; his doctorate was earned at the State University of New York in Buffalo during his PSIP participation.

Linker A's professional experiences began in 1965 as a teacher of educable mentally retarded children at the elementary school level. After one year in the position he moved into a junior high school to teach social science. The following year he became a high school social studies teacher and retained the position for two school terms.

Linker A left education in 1969 to enter the field of community services. He served in a regional office of the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs for two years. In 1971 he became director of a Multi-County Manpower Development Corporation in a Northwestern Pennsylvania community and remained in the position for two years.

During this period of professional experience outside of education Linker A had a great deal of training in and application of human relations skills, group processes, planning and management and administration techniques. He had interactive experiences with clients from all walks of life - ranging from delinquent youth to top state administrators. Although his primary assignment was in Northwestern Pennsylvania the nature of his postions required him to travel throughout the state and to function in many diverse professional situations.

In 1974, Linker A reentered education and became a curriculum coordinator in IU-A. He had served in this position for two years when the IU director recruited him to serve as the PSIP Linker. During his tenure at IU-A previous to PSIP, Linker A had functioned as director of IU inservice training for school districts, director of a Title III teacher center and general curriculum coordinator. He had always been salaried on "soft" money from external sources rather than the IU regular budget.

In addition to his educational and community service experience and background Linker A had been very active in the political world of Northwestern Pennsylvania. At one time he was a school director in one of the districts involved in PSIP. He was also actively involved in the regional curriculum association and participated in planning and presenting some of the association's major conferences.

Linker A in PSIP. Linker A entered PSIP on its initial funding date. This early assignment resulted in a high level of involvement of Linker A in the developmental phases of the PSIP process. He interacted with PSIP agency staff persons in planning, field testing and revising all of the major Local Action Team workshops and Linker Handbook materials.

During the first year of PSIP Linker A had strong on-site leadership and support from the PSIP agency persons serving as School Assistant Teams. Much of his training was on-the-job with modeling provided by the SAT persons. Linker A managed and facilitated the PSIP process in his IU without any major problems. He accepted the responsibility for the critical linking activities needed at each stage of the PSIP process.

Linker A initiated pre-PSIP entry communication with a district's central office. School profile data were gathered by the Linker as a result of this pre-entry contact. He established rapport with school level administrators and provided general orientation to the total staff. Linker A's interpersonal qualities made him very effective in this linking role - he could estimate the readiness of a site for actual PSIP participation.

During the first major PSIP phase - Needs Assessment - Linker A provided heavy structured direction and leadership to the local team in analyzing data and formulating a needs definition. At the same time he fostered effective group processes within the LAT. In order to keep the LAT moving he also assumed the role of catalyst providing external pressure upon the LAT to complete the critical milestone of PSIP. As a resource broker he provided the LAT with access expertise from the PSIP agencies in data analyses procedures.

When the LAT entered the selection phase of PSIP, Linker A provided the LAT access to the information service agency associated with PSIP and thus filled a broker type of role. At the same time he provided the LAT with leadership and training in the selection process. He also organized and planned LAT visits to demonstration sites. A major role played by Linker A at this stage was that of establishing and maintaining communication among the LAT, the total school staff and the district central office.

The predominant role of Linker A during the development of the implementation plan by an LAT was that of process facilitator. At that stage the LAT had all of the information it needed to implement a program change. Linker A provided the LAT with the process and structure necessary to produce a written formal implementation plan to be submitted to the school board for approval. Linker A in most cases provided a direct communication channel to the superintendent and the board. In fact in several cases he assisted in presenting the plan to the board.

When a school actually implemented an R and D outcome, Linker A's involvement with the site tapered off. His role became one of a sounding board, a helper who is there if needed, an available resource. His major on-site role was that of external evaluator since most of the schools requested this help. He provided leadership and direction to the LAT in designing evaluation techniques and instruments and in planning data analysis.

Linker A fulfilled his role as a PSIP Linker from November 1976 until June 1979. During that period he provided Linker services to eight schools in eight different school districts in the PSIP process. Five of his client schools successfully implemented and maintained changes in the curriculum. All of these schools made improvements directly related to an identified problem.

His host agency, Intermediate Unit A, terminated PSIP participation in June 1979 and did not renew Linker A's contract. Presently Linker A is an assistant executive director for curriculum in Intermeidate Unit X. In the position he has implemented the PSIP model and process in two school districts and has also used several PSIP modules independent of the total process or materials for inservice workshops.

Linker A - General Discussion. Linker A was an individual who exhibited the flexibility needed for the role variation characteristic of the linkage process. He basically displayed personal strength in many areas and adjusted his strategies to meet the contingencies that occurred as a school moved through PSIP. In all cases he was considered by the local team as a valued and trusted resource person.

Early in PSIP Linker A was somewhat frustrated by the ambiguity of the Linker role but at no point in time was role conflict apparent. He was able to move into or out of specific roles as required by the PSIP process. As the PSIP processes were clarified and defined during the developmental phases Linker A recognized and assumed the roles required during each major PSIP activity.

Linker A's immediate supervisor in the host agency described his greatest strength as that of "organization" - the ability to manage and plan projected activities, to serve as a process helper and to assume leadership by responding to client needs and playing a proactive role as needed.

Linker A's basic orientatation to the change process was that of incremental gradual change based upon planned decision making. His usual approach to PSIP activities supported this philosophy. His own description of his Linker role (Appendix A) also documents this approach to change.

Linker A demonstrated by his performance that the Linker role is affected by the phases of the PSIP process. During needs assessment he basically provided direct leadership helping the client perceive and clarify problems. At this stage, as a direct intervenor, problem solving, diagnostic skills, communication skills and group facilitating skills were required. The high level of cognitive ability, expertise in intrapersonal skills and Linker A's personal qualities all contributed to his successful performance during needs assessment activities. For the client this phase of PSIP is traumatic and difficult - they are documenting their shortcomings - and the marginality of the Linker allowed him to act as a process facilitator or catalyst for the school teams.

During the selection phase of PSIP Linker A was predominantly responsible for indirect intervention and leaership. He identified external resources and provided structured situations for the school team while the client group assumed responsibility for its own program. The direct leadership role was again assumed during the implementation planning activities when Linker A provided technical assistance and faciliatation services. When a school actually installed the program change, Linker A became a nondirective responder available on request by the school during evaluation activities - a resource person with expertise ready if needed.

The overall effects of Linker A's on-site interaction with the school teams were: school staff acquired increased knowledge and awareness of current research and development, the attitudes of the school team members toward making changes with the program became more positive, the school sites viewed the Intermediate Unit more positively, the personal interaction within the school teams improved, internal leadership within the school improved or emerged, a core of experts in the change process developed at each site, communication improved at the school level and central office support for building level school improvement was increased.

Linker B

Personal Background. Linker B is a white middle class female person in her early thirties. She was born and raised in New Jersey and came to eastern Pennsylvania to attend college. She received a B.S. in elementary education - with concentration in special education and the mentally retarded, a master of education degree with major area of reading specialist - curriculum. She also completed additional graduate course work in learning disabilities, emotionally disturbed and educational administration. Her higher education work was not parochial in nature but encompassed several schools: a bachelor's degree from Millersville State College, master's degree from Lehigh University and additional course work at Pennsylvania State University and Temple University.

Linker B's professional educational experience included four years as a learning disability classroom teacher, a resource room teacher for three years and head teacher for all of the Intermediate Unit B's resource room teachers for three years.

She was part of a National Learning Center Project, working with teachers and students and assisting with data collection. In addition she assisted in developing IU-B's resource room programs, implementing the IU policy in all resource rooms and developing individually prescribed educational programs (IEPs) for children with learning problems.

Linker B is active in several professional organizations: Pennsylvania State Educational Association, Council for Exceptional Children, Association for Children with Learning disabilities, the Orton Society, the International Reading Association and the Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. She was selected as teacher of the year by the Lehigh Valley Association for Children with Learning Disabilities and has been named in Outstanding Educators of Exceptional Children. Her work experiences outside of public education have been as a program coordinator for a nursery school and as a housemother at a school for handicapped boys.

Linker B has traveled extensively in both the United States and Europe and has many diverse interests external to education including skiing, yoga, dance and art. Overall, Linker B is a cosmopolite who brings a wide range of experience to the Linker role.

As noted above, Linker B's educational training and experience were primarily in the area of special education. She had been at Intermediate Unit B for eight years as a special education resource room teacher when she applied for the

position of PSIP Linker in October 1977. Linker B had previously applied for the Linker position in October 1976 but at that time a person external to IU-B had been hired. The IU-B assistant executive director hired Linker B in October 1977 to fill the recently vacated IU-B PSIP Linker position.

Linker B in PSIP. Linker B entered PSIP at a distinct disadvantage. Four schools were already involved in PSIP, all were at different stages of the process, all were familiar with the previous PSIP Linker. The previous PSIP Linker at IU-B had developed great personal rapport and credibility with the four local teams but had not established credibility for the PSIP process with these teams. Linker B, at her entry into PSIP was faced with a difficult and complex task. She had to become familiar with a totally new problem solving process and at the same time develop rapport and credibility with four rather disgruntled local action teams. In addition, Linker B was expected to initiate the PSIP process in four new schools during the 1977-78 school term.

Linker B was provided with a detailed structured PSIP Handbook for Linkers. The handbook provided very explicit instructions for each of the PSIP phases, complete with handouts, agendas, visuals and evaluation instruments. Linker B was provided with intensive initial training in the use of this handbook during her first two months in PSIP. The PSIP director, the evaluator and staff persons from participating agencies all assisted in this Linker training. In addition to the Linker Handbook Linker B was provided with all of the documentation and background information available on the four schools currently involved in PSIP at the time.

Between October and February, Linker B visited each PSIP school in IU-B to establish her identity and role, to update the schools on the status of PSIP in IU-B and to set up a PSIP schedule of activities for each school. She was accompanied on these visits by the IU assistant executive director and/or the PSIP director.

PSIP activities were reinstated at the four initial schools by Linker B during November and December of 1977. She was provided intensive on-site assistance by staff members from PSIP agencies. This on-site assistance coupled with the PSIP Linker Handbook was an on-the-job training for Linker B and within six months she had reached a fairly comfortable level of security in her role as a Linker and in the PSIP process.

In the spring of 1978 additional schools in IU-B entered PSIP. Linker B was still getting intensive support from the PSIP external agencies as she led schools through the process. Her role differed little from the role of Linker A in IU-A but she still needed a lot of support. She was very dependent upon the Linker Handbook and had a tendency to spend too much time on each individual module. The handbook contained several options for each major activity and it was difficult for Linker B to reject any option. As Linker B became more familiar with the PSIP process this dependency upon the handbook decreased and she was more selective and flexible with PSIP activities in the schools.

The fact that the four initial PSIP schools in IU-B were each at a different phase of PSIP meant that Linker B had to become familiar with all four stages of the process at the same time rather than in sequence. This was not the best learning situation but Linker B very effectively mastered the PSIP process during the 1977-78 school term.

During 1978-79 school term four new schools entered PSIP in IU-B. Linker B initiated contacts with the central office in each school district. She collected all of the available data needed for school profiles and needs assessment activities. With assistance from the staff persons from PSIP agencies she provided direct leadership to the local action team in each school during student and program needs analyses. Her thorough planning, attention to detail, intelligent use of information and persistence were effective in moving the new schools through the PSIP phases. In addition she maintained the momentum of PSIP in the original four schools. At this point she had eight schools actively participating in PSIP. Her role and her tactics varied with school characteristics and with phases of PSIP.

During the selection phase Linker B functioned as resource/solution locater, providing schools with entry to information services and sources of R and D products. The planning for implementation stage of PSIP required Linker B to serve as a technical assistant providing nondirective leadershp with enough structure for local action teams to make their own decisions.

When IU-B schools entered the installation and evaluation activities of the implementation process Linker B became basically an on-call resource person available when needed.

Currently in IU-B the Linker is functioning as an IU staff person. The PSIP schools are maintaining their program changes and supporting the PSIP process in other areas of the curriculum. The generic PSIP process has become a part of the IU services and Linker B directs the use of the process and its adaptations.

Linker B - General Discussion. Linker B can best be described by quoting her IU supervisor: "She is flexible, perceptive, adjusts her role to the school she works with, uses local action team feedback to adapt the process and above all she's intelligent."

Linker B's orientation to the change process at the school building was basically one of caution. She believed in extensive planning for the process, considering all possible contingencies and strategies to address them.

When Linker B interacted with local action teams she focused upon developing the concept of an LAT-Linker team working together. The LAT Persons viewed her as an "orchestrator" who planned sessions and "pulled it all together."

The most critical functions of Linker B were (1) organization and planning to make sure "it happened," (2) providing resources and information for the local action teams, and (3) providing a communication link among LAT, central administration and external resources.

Linker B was viewed by LAT persons as a higher level resource person rather than as a peer. The school administrators accepted her as a peer with a special role to perform. This duality of role enabled her to act as an LAT advocate at strategic points in the PSIP process.

The marginality of the Linker role was seen as positive by Linker B. It allowed her to act as a mediator when needed by the LAT and also as a catalyst to facilitate the process when it appeared to bog down. Role ambiguity did not appear to be a problem. Linker B defined and redefined her role as needed by the local action team and by specific PSIP activities.

Linker B assumed the responsibility for (1) making sure the PSIP process was used effectively, (2) getting resources to the LAT at the appropirate time, (3) acting as an LAT advocate, (4) mediating with district administrators, and (5) making sure the LAT got the most benefit from PSIP without violating anyone's priorities.

In general, Linker B functioned as a process facilitator with emphasis upon providing structure and leadership to the local action teams. The intensity of her leadership varied with the phases of PSIP and with the unique needs of each school.

IV. General Comments

On the basis of the case studies of two PSIP Linkers several generalizations can be made. First, the Linker role is characterized by marginality, variability and segmentation. All of these characteristics were viewed as positive by the PSIP Linkers. In fact it seems to be desirable for a Linker to function in a marginal role - it allows for a wide range of interaction and influence upon local action teams, host agencies, and school administration. Role variability provides opportunities for flexibility of linking strategies and tactics - the Linkers can program their own behaviors.

The general comments from LATs that have completed a PSIP experience indicate the following:

- o the Linker is key to the success of PSIP
- o the Linker is needed to maintain the communication with a district's central office
- o the Linker is needed to complete the "between session work"
- o the Linker keeps the LAT on task
- o the Linker <u>is</u> the process leader
- o the Linker needs to be a group facilitator
- o the Linker provides the resources
- o couldn't do it (PSIP) without the Linker
- o the LAT needs someone from outside (the Linker)
- o the Linker "orchestrates" PSIP
- o the Linker was flexible enough for us to complete the process
- o carefully select the Linker and use a structured process
- o the Linker should be a generalist

How does an educational generalist become a successful Linker? First of all he/she is trained. In PSIP two types of Linker training occurred: (1) on-the-job training by the staff as members from PSIP agencies, (this included modeling Linker skills) and (2) formal workshops in specific Linker skills. PSIP Linker B had 39 days of on-the-job training and five days of formal skills workshop training. Linker A had 31 on-the-job training days and five days of formal skills workshop training.

Secondly, the Linker needs a defined structured process as a framework for linkage functions. Both the on-the-job training and the formal workshops were grounded in those linking skills and characteristics outlined in Figure 1. Their experiences in PSIP plus skills training equipped the PSIP Linkers to function effectively with schools in a problem-solving approach to school improvement.

PSIP provided its Linkers with both a model and a structured process for a problem solving approach to school improvement. The PSIP Linker Handbook was used by both Linkers to effectively take schools through PSIP and into program improvement.

PSIP Linker B probably provided an accurate statement about what a Linker is - she said "At first it was frustrating, I had a mind set about the process but now I understand it and can be flexible. I enjoy it - I've become "attached" to the schools just as I did students when I taught - but I know I'll have to let them go.

V. REFERENCES

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Linker A

NIE - R & D Utilization Proposal

Pennsylvania School Improvement Program in Basic Education

Intermediate Unit Linking Agent - Project Facilitator

Duties and Responsibilities:

The Intermediate Unit's function as the linking agency between the (research and resource agencies, RISE, RBS, LRDC, and PDE) and local school districts support the concept of the linking agent (I.U. personnel assigned to the project). The linking agent will act as a third party moving between the identified local school districts and the research and resource agencies identified in the project. The specific duties and responsibilities relating to the project activities are:

1. Assist the target schools in analyzing their basic skills problems.

2. Assist in the development of a knowledge base of R & D outcomes in basic skills.

3. Assist the schools in the selection of R & D outcomes relevant to their basic skills problems.

4. Assist the schools in the implementation of specific programs or practices that they selected.

5. Assist in the formation of the Local Action Team (LAT).

6. Assist the district in the review of EQA results.

7. Review and analyze R & D programs and products.

8. Act as the facilitator between the identified local site (LAT) and the School Assistance Team, the Resource and Development Resource Team and the Management Team on a day to day basis.

9. Coordinate the existing Intermediate Unit's seven mandated services as supportive services to the project objectives:

    1. Curriculum Development and Implementation Services
    2. Educational Materials Services
    3. Instructional Materials Services
    4. Pupil Personnel Services
    5. Continuing Professional Services
    6. State and Federal Agency Liaison Services
    7. Management Services

Linker B

CURRICULUM COORDINATOR FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Curriculum Coordinator for the Pennsylvania School Improvement Program (PSIP) will report and be responsible to the Assistant Executive Director of the IU.

She will coordinate all PSIP and related activities in Intermediate Unit 8 with the primary emphasis on educational program improvement in local school districts.

To meet this responsibility, it shall be her job to:

1. Assist local schools in identifying and analyzing needs for instructional program improvement in basic skills programs.

2. Serve as a link between local school districts and human and materials resources that would address their program needs.

3. Assist local schools in the selection of and the implementation and evaluation planning for educational program improvements.

4. Provide services to assist PDE in the overall management of PSIP.

5. Maintain personal contact with local school district administrators, the Department of Education, Research for Better Schools, Learning Research and Development Center, Research and Information Services for Education, and curriculum service personnel in other intermediate units.

6. Serve as an advisor to the Coordinator of the Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading/Communication Arts Plan (PCRP) and assist her in implementing the project in three target schools.

7. Assume any other duties as prescribed by the Assistant Executive Director.